

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 540

By Crowe

A RESOLUTION recognizing Billy Graham.

WHEREAS, the Christian religion, drawing upon its Old Testament prophetic roots and the example of Jesus' own mission on Earth, grew explosively during the first three centuries of the Christian era; and

WHEREAS, since that time, Christianity's vitality has waxed and waned during the tides of history. That history has been punctuated by the appearance of certain charismatic preachers and teachers of the Gospel who have responded strongly to God's call and have gone out to make a dramatic impact on the lives of thousands of people by helping them to establish a personal relationship with their Creator; and

WHEREAS, one such dedicated servant of God is the Reverend Billy Graham, who, since his ordination to the ministry by a church in the Southern Baptist Convention in 1939, has preached to more people in live audiences than anyone else in history and has conducted nearly four hundred crusades throughout the world; and

WHEREAS, William F. Graham was born November 7, 1918, in Charlotte, North Carolina, to the late William Franklin and Morrow Coffey Graham. He learned the value of hard work on the family dairy farm but still managed to read widely during his youth; and

WHEREAS, in the fall of 1934, a traveling evangelist, Mordecai Ham, brought his ministry to Charlotte, and at age sixteen, young Billy made a personal commitment to Christ. Five years later, he was ordained to the ministry; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Graham attended the Florida Bible Institute and, in 1943, graduated from Wheaton College in Illinois; and

WHEREAS, on August 13, 1943, Billy Graham married Wheaton classmate, Ruth Bell (1920-2007), whose parents were Presbyterian missionaries in China. Her father, L. Nelson Bell, was a general surgeon. Mr. Graham met her at Wheaton: "I saw her walking down the road towards me and I couldn't help but stare at her as she walked. She looked at me and our eyes met and I felt that she was definitely the woman I wanted to marry." Ruth thought that Billy "wanted to please God more than any man I'd ever met." The couple married two months after graduation and later lived in a log cabin, one designed by Mrs. Graham, in the Blue Ridge Mountains in Montreat, North Carolina. Mrs. Graham passed away on June 14, 2007, at the age of eighty-seven; and

WHEREAS, Billy and Ruth Graham had five children together: Virginia "Gigi" Leftwich Graham (born in 1945 and became an inspirational speaker and author), Anne Graham Lotz (born in 1948 and runs AnGeL ministries), Ruth Graham (born in 1950 and is the founder and president of Ruth Graham Ministries and leads conferences throughout the U.S. and Canada), Franklin Graham (born in 1952 and serves as president and CEO of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and as president and CEO of international relief organization Samaritan's Purse), and Nelson Edman Graham (born in 1958 and is a pastor who runs East Gates Ministries International, which distributes Christian literature in China). Billy Graham has nineteen grandchildren and numerous great-grandchildren. Grandson William Franklin Graham IV is an Associate Evangelist with the BGEA and the Executive Director of the Billy Graham Training Center at the Cove and grandson Tullian Tchividjian is the senior pastor of the Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Graham served as the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Western Springs, Illinois, from 1943-45, and then spent the next five years as Charter Vice President of Youth for Christ International in Chicago. He preached throughout the United States and Europe following the Second World War, and emerged as a promising evangelist; and

WHEREAS, a scheduled three-week crusade in Los Angeles in 1949 drew overflow crowds and was extended to eight weeks, projecting Mr. Graham into international prominence.

In 1950, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association was founded in Minneapolis and the "Hour of Decision" radio program, heard on more than 600 stations around the world, was launched; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Graham has long held that all men are created equal, a belief which led him to become an early civil rights leader in this country. As early as 1952, he was working to unite the worlds of black and white, and during a crusade in Jackson, Mississippi, he personally removed the ropes which separated the audience in the stadium along racial lines and encouraged those in attendance to worship and live as brothers; and

WHEREAS, Billy Graham's ministry has carried God's message around the world, including the world's major cities, remote African villages, most of the nations of the former Eastern bloc, and to both heads of state and humble tribesmen. Millions more have been reached through crusade television specials, the newspaper column "My Answer," *Decision* magazine, the productions of World Wide Pictures, and the bestselling books written by Mr. Graham; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Graham has counseled Presidents of the United States and has received numerous awards and honors, including the Congressional Gold Medal, the Templeton Foundation Prize for Progress in Religion, the Big Brother Award, and recognition by B'nai B'rith and the National Conference of Christians and Jews; he has also received honorary degrees and other honors and awards too numerous to mention; and

WHEREAS, Billy Graham has many times been named one of the "Ten Most Admired Men in the World," has appeared on the covers of major news magazines in this country, and has been the subject of countless magazine and newspaper feature articles and books; and

WHEREAS, despite all the trappings of fame inherent in a worldwide ministry, Mr. Graham continues faithfully to follow his statement that, "My one purpose in life is to help people find a personal relationship with God, which, I believe, comes through knowing Christ"; and

WHEREAS, on November 7, 2013, Billy Graham celebrated his ninety-fifth birthday and, during that week, delivered what is likely his final message to the world; and

WHEREAS, it is wholly fitting that this body recognize Billy Graham for his tireless service to his Lord and his redoubtable efforts to bring the message of Gospel of Christ to all corners of the world; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that that we hereby recognize and commend Reverend Billy Graham for his many years of service to the Gospel, applaud his service to God and to his fellow man, and extend our best wishes for his every future success and happiness.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.